

In ancient times, all kinds of beautiful chiffon and gauze were worn as the summer months rolled around.

Page 2



Eating lotus leaves and drinking lotus seed soup is an effective way of keeping the body cool.

Page 3

Very few people today know how to make genuine lotus leaf porridge.

Page 3



今日北京 BEIJING TODAY

FRIDAY MAY 7 2004

NO. 153

CN11-0120

HTTP://BJTODAY.YNET.COM

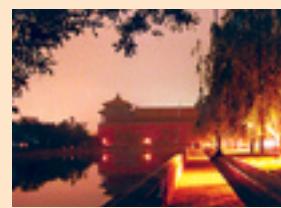


According to the lunar calendar, Li Xia (立夏) the seventh solar term, marks the beginning of summer. This year, Li Xia fell on May 5. To mark the arrival of the new season, *Beijing Today* is publishing an eight-page special summer edition, as this May Day holiday draws to a close.

Pages 2 and 3 focus on how Chinese people enjoyed, suffered or otherwise coped with summer in days gone by. Pages 4 to 8 offer practical information and tips about where to go, what to eat and drink, and what summer sports will make essential TV viewing.

Stay Cool

Keeping cool is the name of the game in summertime Beijing. Called *chengliang* in Chinese, the traditional way of doing it is going for an evening stroll. On the Unwind page, we suggest a few popular strolling spots, augmented with a few ideas for evening bicycle rides around town – nothing too strenuous, of course! (Page 4)



Get Out of Town

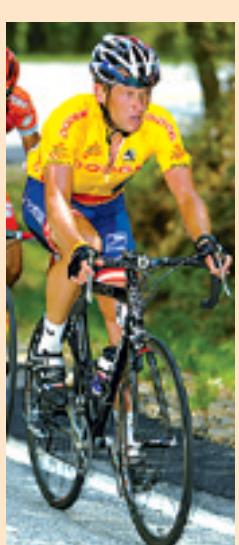
When it comes time to plan that summer holiday, whether it is just for the weekend or the big question is – do you want to enjoy the heat or do you want to get away from it? In our summer escape section, *Beijing Today* serves up ideas for a laze-on-the-beach, work-on-the-sun-tan holiday, a trip to the grasslands of Inner Mongolia, a mountain retreat, and a visit to Chengde, summer resort of the Qing royal family – something for everybody! (Page 5)



Hot Sport

The time for talk is nearly over. The Olympics and the Euro 2004 Soccer tournament are nearly upon us.

Part of what makes these events special is that they only come around every four years, so the need to get the preparations right is under extra scrutiny. The Greeks will attest to that as the world media chews over every new headline about their race to be ready for the games.



Portugal, hosts of Euro 2004, also have a lot to live up to, Euro 2000 having been such a memorable tournament. Can their players step up and justify their talent?

And as if those two events weren't enough, sports fans can also look forward to perennial summer favorites The French Open and the Tour de France. (Page 6)

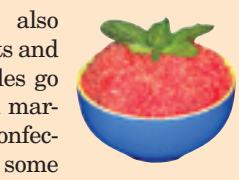
Eat to Beat the Heat

Appetites may fade in summer heat, but hot weather eating can actually be pleasant and soothing if approached in the right way. Traditional Chinese medicine holds that summer is time to eat plenty of foods that can *quhuo*, or reduce internal body heat, such as most fruits and more exotic items such as water caltrop and bitter melon. (Page 7)



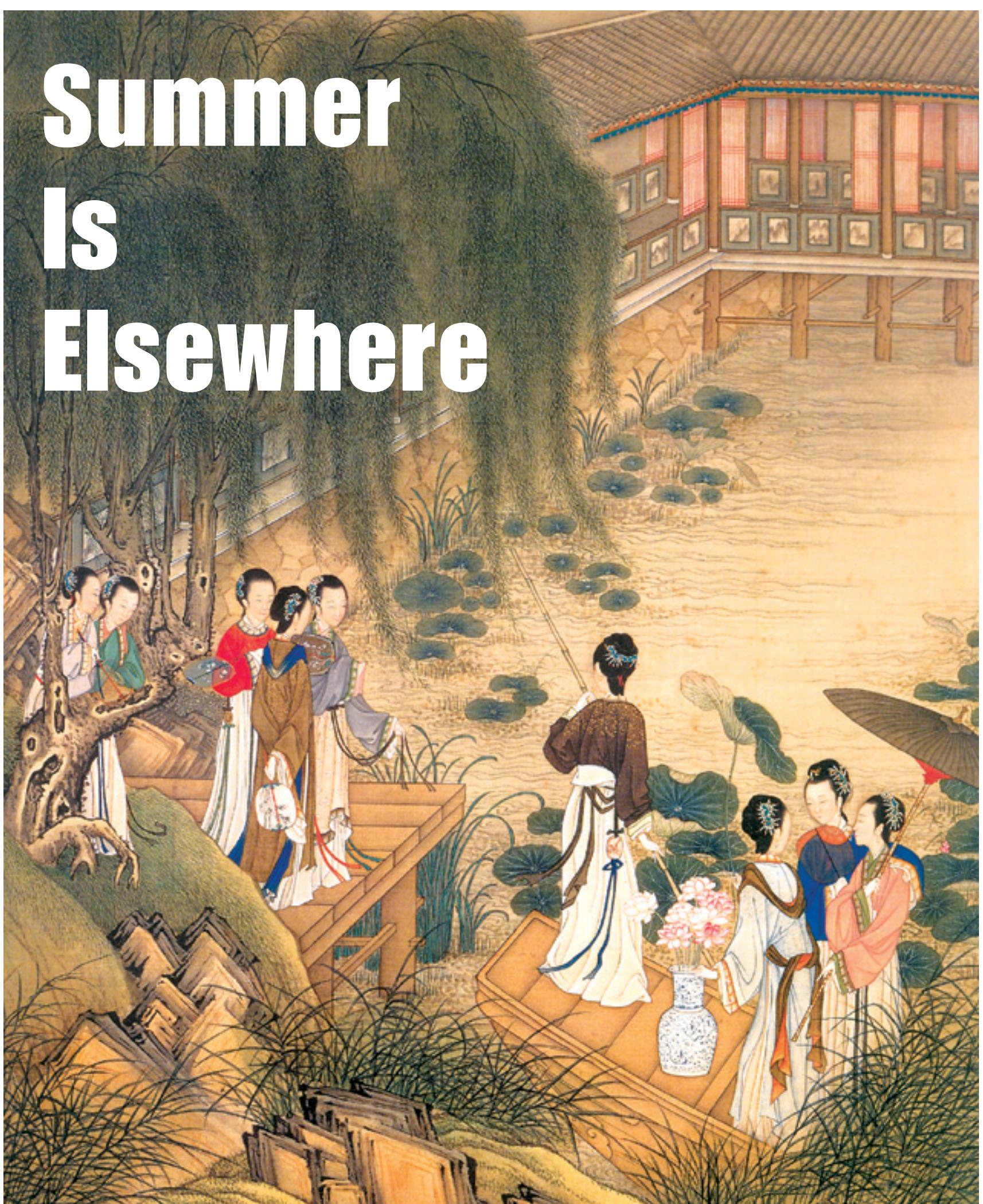
Chill Out!

Summer, of course, is also high season for frozen treats and a time when ice cream sales go through the roof. The local market is stuffed with frozen confection choices, some familiar, some bizarre. On particularly hot days when all things creamy lose their appeal, stick with pure ice, in the form of a refreshing granita, or a Taiwanese-style shaved ice dessert, both of which are easy and fun to make at home. (Page 8)



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Summer Is Elsewhere



Detail of Yueman Qingyou Tuce, by Chen Mei (Qing Dynasty)

By Zhao Pu/Yu Shanshan

When we first started to plan a special summer issue, we traced back to see how our ancestors used to make the most of the season and escape from its oppressive heat.

Living in a society that largely takes for granted modern technology like air conditioning and refrigeration, the ingenuity and creativity of those people from earlier times is a source of constant amazement. It is not so much about choices and options, what really impressed us was the delicate love and enthusiasm with which they embraced every detail of daily life.

In wealthy families, people used to partition off a part of the room with gauze screens. The enclosed space, referred to as *bi sha chu* or green gauze cabinet, was for people to sit or sleep in during summer. This "cabinet" would allow the breeze to pass through while at the same time, keep the mosquitoes at bay.

It is said that women in ancient times would buy partially-blossoming sprays of jasmine during the day in summer to put in their hair. When

night fell, the flowers had fully blossomed, emitting a delicate fragrance.

During the course of summer, the ancient Chinese celebrated five different festivals. One of these, Lotus Birthday, falls on the 24th day of the sixth lunar month (August 9 this year).

People in Beijing would flock to the city's various lakes on this day to admire the pink lotuses blooming. All kinds of colorful lotus lanterns were made and lotus-lantern shows were always popular. Boating leisurely on the lakes and enjoying the sunshine, it was sometimes difficult to the real lotuses from the lotus lanterns.

Trying to imagine such scenes of summer days hundreds of years ago, it seems that people living in ancient times somehow managed to keep a closer and friendly relationship with nature, with a slower, more gentle pace of life.

That can help explain the fascination of people today for times when technology was not so developed, there were fewer people competing for survival and life was slow.

"Get back to nature" and "slow

down and enjoy the gifts given by life" are popular catch-phrases these days in China. But when we look back, it is still surprising to find what we are striving to achieve today is not so far removed from the kind of lifestyle that our ancestors enjoyed for thousand of years.

The half-forgotten festive activities, the household routines, even the exquisite make-up vividly expatiated on the philosophies of "unity of nature and man." As the ancient philosopher Lao Zi taught, the human body must follow and adapt itself to the laws of nature in order to grow and thrive.

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Summer Customs of the Ancient Chinese

People today make preparations for the warm summer months, and it was no different in ancient times. Whether in summer fashions, or methods of cooling down the house, summer brings a whole new lifestyle.

Festive Summer Comes!

By Sheng Mingming

As summer approaches, a series of colorful activities begin in which the Chinese people celebrate their lunar summer holidays.

Duanwu Festival

The Duanwu Festival, the first lunar holiday of the summer, falls on the 5th day of the 5th month of the Chinese lunar calendar (June 22 this year). It is also known as the Double-Fifth Day, May Festival, Daughter's Day, Poet's Day, and the Dragon Boat Festival.

This festival dates back to about 2,000 years ago with a number of legends explaining its origin. It's related to a series of traditions, such as people's worship of dragons and ancient activities in early summer to ward off diseases brought by hot weather. Of these, the best-known story centers on a great patriotic poet of the Warring States period named Qu Yuan, who drowned himself in frustration at the lack of vital progress in his state.

To ward off evil spirits and diseases associated with hot weather, people put up pictures of Zhongkui, a legendary Chinese exorcist, and hang mugwort on their front doors. They also drink specially brewed potions said to combat all kinds of poisons. Children will receive extra care at this special time, wearing necklaces or bracelets made of red, yellow, blue, white and black threads, to ward off evil. They may receive presents such as colorful pouches containing fragrant herbal medicines. Mothers also bathe their children in water boiled with herbal medicines.

June Sixth Day

The June Sixth Day falls on the 6th day of the 6th lunar month (in fact it's July 22 this year). Also called Dashu (or Great Heat), the Day is one of China's 24 Jieqi, or solar terms, signaling the beginning of the hottest part of the summer.

Also on this day, it's traditional for families to air their clothes in the sun, especially in areas to the south of the Yangtze River. People must take out their clothes from chests and wardrobes to air them to stop them from becoming damp. In some places, cats and dogs are washed on this day.

Young ladies especially love this festival. At night, they pick off and mash the red flowers of balsamine, making perfect nail polish for their fingers.

Lotus' Birthday

The sixth month of the Chinese lunar calendar is called the Lotus Month. The birthday of the lotus is celebrated on the 24th day of the 6th lunar month (August 9 this year).



Mothers smear herbal medicine on their children's forehead for the Duanwu Festival.

People flock to see the pink lotuses blooming in the lakes. All kinds of colorful lotus lanterns are made and various lotus-lantern shows are held. It's a perfect excuse for leisurely boating on lakes to see the lanterns glowing all around.

In Chinese Buddhism, Guanyin, the Buddhist Goddess of Mercy, is often depicted holding a lotus which she gazes at with downcast eyes or reclining on an expanse of lotuses. The sight of the lotus blooming in ponds and moats signifies that the Buddhists' prayers to the Dragon King (the God of Rain) have been answered and there will be sufficient moisture for an abundant harvest.

Double-Seventh Day (Chinese Valentine's Day)

The Double-Seventh Day refers to the 7th day of the 7th month in the Chinese lunar calendar, falling on August 22 this year. It is also known as Praying for Ingenuity Festival and Chinese Valentine's Day.

It is a special day for loving couples. Almost everyone in China, young and old, is familiar with the story behind this festival, the Cowherd and the Girl Weaver. The Weaver, favorite daughter of the Heavenly Emperor, falls in love with the poor mortal cowherd. Their secret marriage enrages the Heavenly Empress who breaks the union and draws the Milky Way to keep them apart. The couple then can only see each other once a year, on the 7th day of July.

In ancient times, the Double-Seventh Day was a festival especially for young women. The day before, young ladies would leave a bowl of clean water in the shining sun for a whole day. On the next morning they would float a needle or a thin bamboo stem on the water surface of the bowl. If the shadow of the needle or stem was unchanged, then the lady was believed ingenious, which was an important virtue for a woman. And, vice versa.

Ghost Festival

The 15th day of the 7th lunar month is the Chinese Ghost Festival, also known as Zhongyuan Festival and Yu Lan Pen Festival. It falls on August 30 this year.

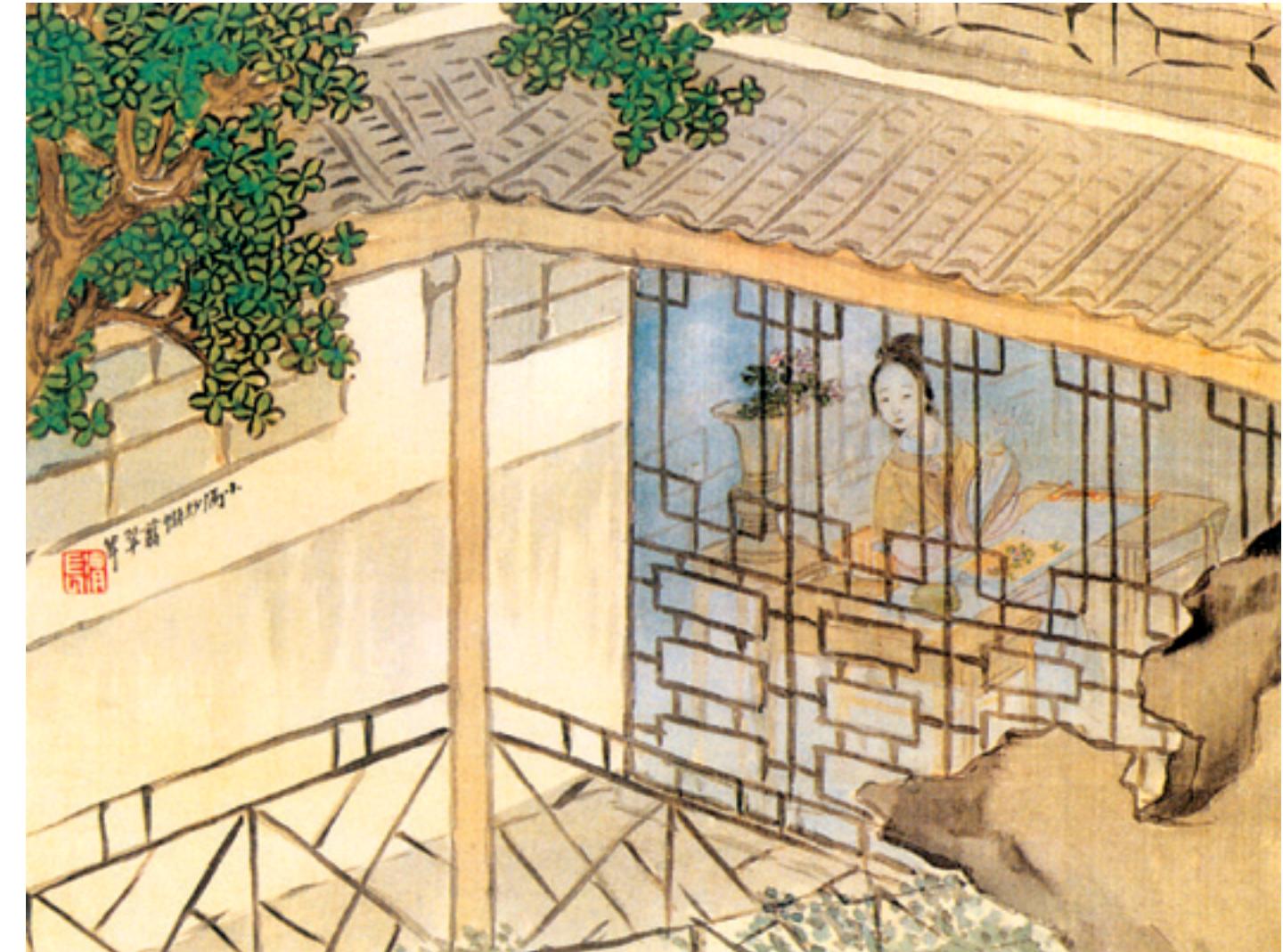
This day used to be a religious ceremony in India. Buddhists would hold the Yu Lan Pen Festival in memory of their forefathers. There was a sutra tale about how the monk, Mulian, saved his mother from suffering in hell. Buddha told Mulian to save his mother on the 15th day of the 7th lunar month with the Yu Lan Pen Canon, which was compiled to encourage Buddhists' piety. So it went with the Chinese custom of commemorating their ancestors and became popular in many Chinese regions.

At night, lotus-shaped lanterns are lit in front of the doors of each household. In some places, people light water-lanterns, which are made by setting a lotus-shaped lantern on a piece of board and floating it in the water. The more lanterns the better. It is said that the lanterns are used to direct the ghosts. During the festival, shops often close to leave the streets to the ghosts.

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Lotus' Birthday

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Green Gauze Cabinet (bi sha ge) was used in rich families.

Pictures provided by Meng Hui

Ancient Air Conditioning

By Zhao Pu/Zhang Huan

People of different classes had various ways of cooling down their houses in ancient times.

In the Tang Dynasty (618 - 907AD), there was a "cooling hall" in the imperial palace, furnished with mechanical refrigerating equipment. Cold water would be pumped up to the roof and then allowed to run down along the eaves, forming an artificial water curtain. On the other side, cool wind was blown into the hall with a fan-shaped wheel which was powered by the water.

By the time of the Song Dynasty (960 - 1279AD), the

cool hall was decorated with flowers, so that the breeze would waft their pleasant aroma around the room. There were also some small pools with bamboo and other plants.

In rich families, gauze curtains were often used to partition off a space in the room. The space, surrounded on four sides by the curtains, was named the Green Gauze Cabinet (bi sha ge). People could sit or sleep in it leaving the window and the door of the outer room open. The small area allowed wind to pass through at the same time as preventing mosquitoes from getting in. Sometimes paper curtains were put underneath

the gauze to keep out strong wind and dirt.

Similar to the gauze curtains, a kind of paper house was also popular in rich families. The paper house was usually put in the courtyard and could be used as a study or sleeping room. Some rich people specially designed such rooms as an escape from the summer heat. The house would be built beside water and at a higher place so the wind could blow through. Around the house, trees and flowers were densely planted.

In ancient Beijing, putting up a "sky platform" was a common way for ordinary people to avoid the heat. There

were many craftsmen who made a living by it. The platform was put up in the center of a courtyard, stretching out over the roofs of the surrounding houses and thus shading the whole courtyard from the sun. The strong wind in a thunderstorm could easily blow through without upsetting the structure.

Even the imperial palace in the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) called in craftsmen to build such a sun shield. It is said that the one built in the Summer Palace for Empress Dowager Cixi was as magnificent as a real palace and the empress spent most of her time there.



Women in the Western Han Dynasty wore a cloth lining beneath gauze outer garments so that no skin would be exposed.

Summer Dress and Adornment

By Zhao Pu/Zhang Huan

In ancient times, summer fashions were as important for women as they are today. All kinds of beautiful chiffon and gauze as well as cool stone ornaments and flowers were worn as the warmer months rolled around. Various powders and perfumes were also used to cover up any unseemly human odors.

The most popular summer threads were silk, cotton, linen and ramie fabrics. People also split plantain leaves into fibers from which thread for clothing could be spun. In the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), a special cloth named Silver Yarn became popular. It was made by weaving thin silver thread into a gauze, so the clothes made of Silver Yarn would sparkle in the sun.

Semi-transparent gauze was ideal for the summer heat. It wasn't too racy, though. In the Western Han Dynasty (206 B.C. - A.D.24), a time when the textile industry was flourishing, women had already begun wearing gauze made of silk and cotton, but according to the conservative feudal ideology, they wore a cloth lining below the gauze so that no skin would be exposed.

However, from the Northern and Southern Dynasties till the Tang and the Song Dynasties (420-1279), the most open time in Chinese ancient history, women often wore a strapless top under the gauze, exposing their shoulders and cleavage. Such dress could be seen not only in private houses but also at social activities.

But the party was over in the Ming and the Qing Dynasties (1368-1911), when such fashions were regarded as licentious and appropriate only for prostitutes. It was back to the lining cloth.

The most enduring summer accessories were jade ornaments since jade is cool to the touch. It was also believed to have the property of warding off evil spirits. Women also liked to wear flowers in their hair.

In summer, Jasmine flowers were the most popular, thanks to their elegant appearance and smell. They were sold everywhere. It is said that prostitutes often bought Jasmine flowers at noon before they had blossomed fully so that when the night came, the flowers would open and release an enticing fragrance.

Perfumes were also widely used, for practical as well as alluring purposes. Women put on scented powder after a bath and their clothes were scented beforehand with special incense. Women and men all wore perfume satchels under their outer garments to give off a subdued fragrance. The perfume satchels were often exquisitely woven with gold and silver thread and decorated with small pearls, which often became gifts between lovers. Liquid distilled from roses was often used as a perfume.

How the Ancients Dealt with Summer's Dog Days

People in ancient China developed a complete set of recipes for eating well throughout the year – certain roads for certain seasons – and summer was no exception. As well as food that helped counter internal heat, different wares were invented to counter external heat.

What they ate...

In China's traditional lunar calendar, the hottest days of summer fall in the "Sanfu," or "Three Dog Days." This year, that sweltering period falls between the end of June and July 17.

For dealing with the heat between the dog days, ancient Chinese worked out many kinds of special foods effective in cooling the body, countering the effects of excessive internal heat and generally benefiting health.

As early as the Han Dynasty (206 BC - 220 AD), people had worked out an entertaining way to avoid overheating by holding drink-offs of fruit-based spirits. Later Chinese worked out the less punishing method of eating cakes boiled in hot soup. The cakes, served hot, induced heavy sweating, an effective means of both excising body heat and cooling the skin.

Not until hundreds of years later, in the Song Dynasty (960-1279 AD), were more foods cherished for their cooling powers, such as melons, plums, lotus leaves and mung beans. People of that flourishing period were very concerned about health and tended to spend summer days in riverside pavilions or mountain retreats to beat the heat.

Some records indicate that Song-era people's favorite summertime food was watermelon, believed not only to moderate heat but also to have health perks. To this day, traditional Chinese medicine holds that watermelon is good for the throat and capable of improving the mood.

Another effective cooling food recognized for centuries in China is lotus. The plant's leaves may taste bitter, but they are able to dispel inner heat, act as a diuretic and can quench thirst.

During the Song, people figured out lotus seeds were great for cooling down and the drinking of lotus seed soup caught on all over the country under the later Ming and Qing Dynasties (1368-1911 AD). Today, doctors believe the seeds are good for the spleen, kidneys and intestines.

Beijingers in the Qing (1644-1911 AD) relied on Chinese herbs to fight back summer. Records show many families had the practice of eating big, special meals on the three Dog Days, while others cooked a special kind of soup made with a variety of herbs such as *zisuye* leaves, ageratum and licorice and then served it to paupers on the street.

Those three herbs are specifically mentioned in Chinese medical texts for

Selling of Plum Syrup



their summer-appropriate properties. *Zisuye* leaves can cure coughing fits and reduce phlegm, licorice is an effective body detoxifier and ageratum stalks are prized as treatments for halitosis, headaches and lack of appetite.

While most likely "good for the body," that herbal brew may not sound so good to many people today. To get some more modern ideas on foods for summer, check out page 7 and 8.

Some special food and drink

The origin of ice cream

Ice cream, now probably the world's favorite frozen dessert, was first invented in China roughly 4,000 years ago as a primitive product more akin to basic milk ice.

At that time, the milking of farm animals was a new idea in China and milk was a prized commodity. A favorite dish of the nobility was a paste made from overcooked rice, spices and milk, combined and packed into snow until frozen. With all the milk involved,

the paste was considered a symbol of serious wealth.

As people got more comfortable with freezing foods, they started collecting and preserved snow brought in from the mountains. The cold crystals were then turned into sweet treats made of fruit juice mixed with ice, often then mixed again with milk ice.

A technological breakthrough in the late Tang Dynasty (618-908 AD) made it possible to produce such icy confections in large quantities and year-round. That invention was saltpeter, which when carefully added to water can drop its temperature to the point that ice can be formed in the middle of a hot summer day. By the 13th century, carts selling frozen desserts were common summer sights on the streets of Beijing.



Making of lotus leaf porridge

Ice cream made its way to the rest of the world through Marco Polo when he returned to his native Italy. In 1553, an Italian chef who served ice cream at the celebration of Catherine d'Medici to future French King Henry, introduced the dessert to France, where it developed into the silky, milky confection people think of today.

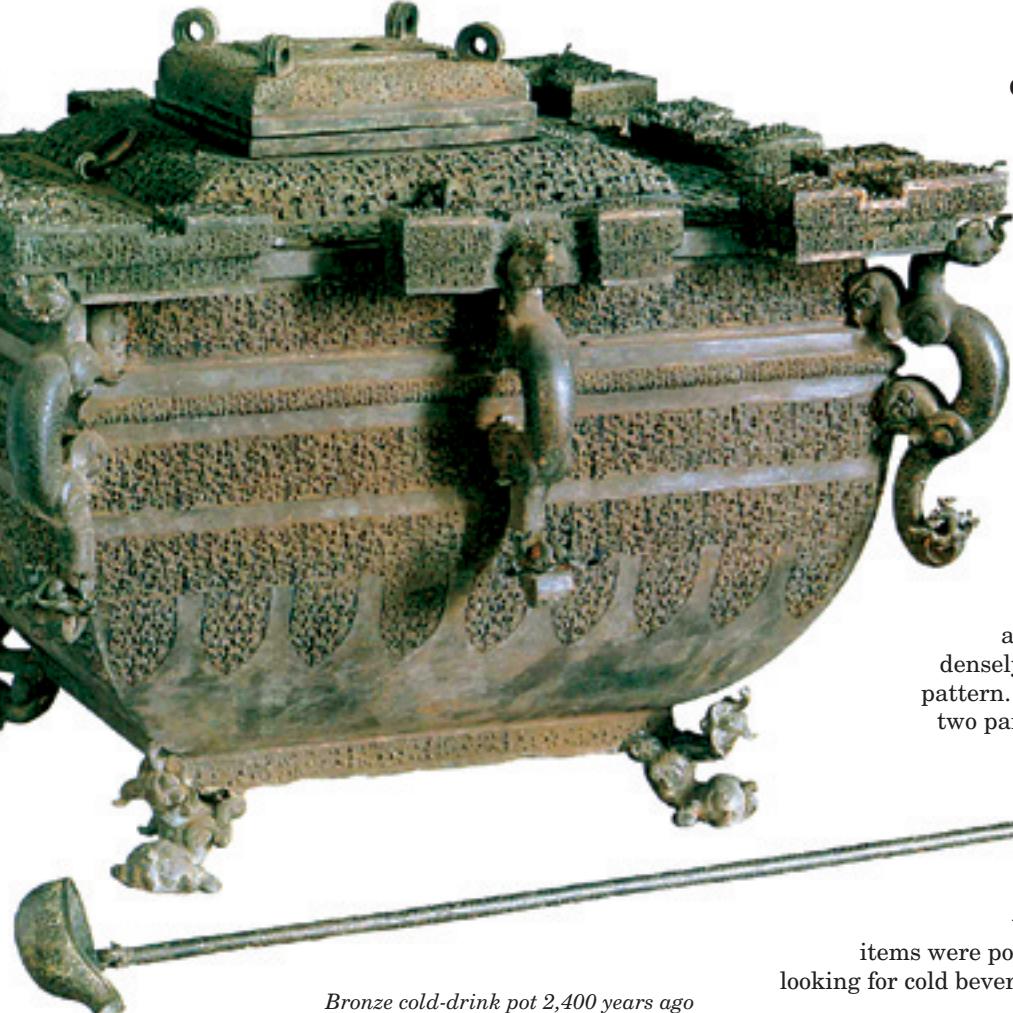
Drink: Suanmei Tang (Plum Syrup) and Plum Rain Tea

Like many Chinese idioms, the phrase "Thinking of Plums to Quench Thirst" harks back to a historic tale, this one involving Cao Cao, the legendary King of Wei during the Three Kingdoms period (220-265). One day, Cao Cao was leading some of his forces through a particularly arid stretch of land. As the sun beat down on them, the soldiers started feeling desperate as there was no sign of water. Their king told them that not far ahead stood a grove of plum trees, sure to be filled with big, ripe fruit. The mere thought of the plums (which proved imaginary) was enough to bring water to the soldiers' mouths and allow them to make it through the ordeal.

The thirst-quenching abilities of actual plums are well documented and sparked the creation of *suanmeitang*, or plum syrup, made from soaking dark plums in water until soft and then flavoring the brew with sugar, osmanthus and honey. Not only delicious, this cold beverage can soothe coughs and cut through phlegm.

Now widespread among the masses, *suanmeitang* started as an exclusive drink of the Qing royal family and slowly spread to the public. Today, bottles of prepared *suanmeitang* as well as instant powder for making it at home can be found in most supermarkets.

In southern China, spring showers have long been called "plum rain," because the rainy season usually coincides with the time when plums



Bronze cold-drink pot 2,400 years ago



This painting by Ming Dynasty artist Cui Zizhong shows two servants making tea for scholars in a garden.

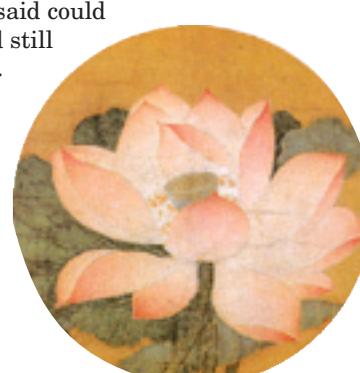
ripen. During that time of year in the Ming and Qing Dynasties, people would clean out big jars and place them in their yards to collect rain. That water was then used to make tea, called "plum rain tea," which it was said could be stored overnight and still keep its color and taste.

In Nanjing, Jiangsu Province, poets, writers and other intellectuals would regularly congregate at a local Buddhist nunnery to craft poems, drink plum rain tea and enjoy the outdoors.

Dish: Lvduo Tang (green bean soup)

Soup made from mung beans and served cold has been a favorite summer treat in Beijing for centuries, and is still widely made by later generations of Lao Beijingers.

To make this soothing concoction, boil fresh beans in enough water to more than cover, stopping when they are half cooked to peel their green skins. Return the beans to the water and cook until completely soft. Then strain out the beans, allow the soup to cool and add sugar to taste. Store any leftovers in the refrigerator.



Painting of a lotus by Southern Song artist Wu Bing



Lotus leaf cup, Southern Song to early Ming dynasty

What they used...

China's first thermos

The bronze cold-drink pot, or *tong bingjian*, discovered in a tomb dating back to the 430 BC during the Warring States Period, is considered the earliest incarnation of refrigeration technology in China. Found in 1978 in Suizhou, Hebei Province, the surprisingly sophisticated and beautifully crafted vessel was used to cool wine for important rituals and grand banquets held by the Marquis of Zeng.

The most striking feature of the massive pot, which stands over half a meter tall and weighs around 170 kilograms, is its surface, densely covered in an elaborate, raised pattern. The vessel is actually made of two parts, a larger outer pot and a smaller square bronze pot inside. A wide gap was purposefully left between the two parts so that ice could be stuffed to cool wine poured into the middle pot. These ingenious items were popular among ancient noble families looking for cold beverages on hot summer days.



"Lady Bamboo" pillows

"Lady Bamboo" pillows

Over the millennia, Chinese have developed myriad ways to harness bamboo, a hearty, large grass that grows all over this country. Thin strands of bamboo are woven together to make wicker-like chairs, beds and even sheets treasured for their ability to let through cooling fresh air in the hot summer. Ancient Chinese even invented a bamboo body pillow, called *zhufuren*, literally translated as "lady bamboo," normally shaped as meter-long tubes. The middle was hollow and the structure latticed with small holes between the bamboo strips. People would place the pillows in well water before going to bed and then embrace them, letting the cool air passing through lull them to comfortable sleep.

Lotus leaves - cups of the literati

Ancient Chinese scholars harnessed nature to invent an elegant yet less aristocratic vessel for drinking wine in summer - the lotus leaf cup, or *bitongyin*.

The cups were literally made with pliable lotus leaves folded into conical shapes. The leaves' wide stems were pierced down their lengths, converting them into organic straws for directly drinking down wine poured into the cups.

Records written by Tang Dynasty (618-907) historian Deng Chengshi indicate the inventor of the lotus leaf cup was Wu Gongque, a prominent official and famed scholar of the ancient Three Kingdoms period. He came up with the idea for the natural container while on a summer retreat in Jinan, Shandong Province with friends and subordinates.

After Wu's death, the legend of the lotus cup grew, and the vessels were repeatedly praised in eloquent words by famed Tang poets. Part of their appreciation had to do with the lotus' standing as a symbol of overcoming difficulty, as the plants rise from river muck into elegance and beauty.

By the time of the Song Dynasty, *bitongyin* had become status symbols among China's upper class and representatives of intellectuals, a select social group that not only led academic developments but also held sway over larger social trends.

Drinking from lotus leaf cups was particularly popular during boating trips on summer nights, as small craft plied waters between lotus plants and lilies filled the air with fragrance.

Later, artists' affection for the cups lead them to craft more durable versions from gold, silver and jade.

Among the great poets who waxed lyrical about lotus leaf cups was Su Dongpo (also known as one of China's greatest gastronomists). At one point in his life he had a bad turn of fortune and was forced to sell off his extensive collection of drinking vessels. Yet he refused to part with one, a beautiful lotus leaf cup made of jade.

Beyond their elegance, lotus leaf cups were prized because they imparted a delicate scent and slightly bitter edge to wine. According to traditional Chinese medicine, summer is a good time to eat a little bitterness as a means of countering the oppressive heat.

Translated by Lu Pinrou, Guo Yuandan, Wang Xiaoxiao, Jiang Yongzhu, and Yu Shanshan
Edited by Yu Shanshan
Illustrated by Li Binsheng



Night view of the Forbidden City

Photos by Ian Provan

By Ian Provan

The daydream-inducing prospect of a long, hot summer, delicious as it may be, raises a serious question. What do you do in Beijing when the temperature is approaching 40 degrees, other than gaze wistfully out the window of your air-conditioned office, or maintain a sensible body temperature by way of ingesting a steady flow of cold beer at a Houhai bar? Get out of town of course, if you know what's good for you.

If, however, getting out of town is not an option, then you will need to brush up on your *chengliang* strategies. *Chengliang* means "take advantage of the cool," where "cool" is understood to mean any degree of improvement on the searing heat of the early afternoon.

Usually, *chengliang* involves a leisurely *sanbu*, or stroll, punctuated with the occasional bit of a sit down, and is best performed with a woven bamboo fan in one hand. Note that, for advanced practitioners at least, there is no requirement to actually walk in the direction in which one is facing.

A less traditional, slightly more active way of taking advantage of the cool is to get on your bike and pedal off into the sunset. The great thing about living in a city with only one real hill (which is smack in the middle of a no-bicycles-permitted-park) is that cycling requires the barest minimum of effort. You can ride for miles in Beijing without working up a sweat, no gears required.



Yuan City Wall Park

By Su Wei

A Walk in the Park

Dongdan Park

South of the Dongdan end of Oriental Plaza, Dongdan Park has long been a popular spot to *chengliang*. There is a hill at the northern end with densely planted trees, perfect for practicing your *tai chi*, and to the south, a small lake and a children's playground.

As well as walking, you can have a 10 yuan, open-air haircut, have your fortune told, and be entertained by buskers.

Peking University

Another traditionally popular place for taking the air is around the banks of Weiming (No Name) Lake at Peking University.

What Qian Mu, the scholar who named the lake was getting at, was that it is a place of beauty, peace and profundity – no name is necessary. It was once part of a royal garden of the Qing dynasty, and is still a wonderfully tranquil place to walk or just sit on one of the stone seats and enjoy the fresh air.

The Boya Tower on the southeast bank of Weiming Lake was built in 1924. Built as a water tower, it was named after Bo Chenguang, a professor in the department of philosophy at that time. In Chinese, "Bo" means plenty, and "Ya" means elegance, so "Boya" also refers to the culture of the university, and the culture of China.

Huangchenggen Relic Park

The Huangchenggen (Ancient Wall of the Imperial City) Relics Park extends from Chang'an Avenue in the south to Ping'an Avenue in the north, between Wangfujing and the Forbidden City. Greened by the early rains this year, the park is 2,800 meters long and 29 meters wide, and marks the site of what was once the eastern wall of the imperial city.

In summer, along the paths and on the lawns, the gardenias, magnolias, pink flowering almonds and purple-leaved plums are already in blossom. The elderly come to sit on the benches, chat with friends and enjoy the sunshine, while kids play here and fly their kites.

There are four distinct areas, called Plum Blossoms and Orchids in the Spring Rain, Fresh Imperial Spring in Summer, Silver Maples in Autumn, and Emerald Green Bamboo and Pines in Winter. Together, they contain more than 3,000 trees and 44,000 shrubs as well as 40,000 square meters of lawn.

There is also public art aplenty. Sculptures include Metal-Cast Layout of the Imperial City, Space Dialogue, Playing Chess, Turning a New Page in History, and Dewdrops. They are intended to fit in with the various historic sites nearby the park, and give visitors a glimpse of the history and customs of old Beijing.

The Huangchenggen Relics Park features many historic and cultural sites. Near the southwestern corner of the park is the former location of the Western Returned Scholars Association. The building was once an imperial ancestral temple. To the north, at No. 19 Fengfu Hutong, off Dengshikou, is the Danshi



Hucheng He, at Guang'anmen

Xiaoyuan (Red Persimmon Yard), the former home of famous writer Lao She. At the corner of Shatai is the Red Building, where students from Peking University launched the May Fourth Movement in 1919. Near the northeastern end of the park, stands a building that combines Chinese and Western architectural styles, formerly the Sino-French University, established in the early 20th century.

By Ian Provan

Get on Your Bike

Beijing's network of canals and rivers make perfect summer city biking routes. Starting from around Dongbianmen, east of Beijing Railway Station, head south along the road that follows the west bank of the canal (cycling along the second ring road is not recommended) down past Longtan Park. Once you pass Longtan Lu, there are bikeable paths along both banks, or you can stay on the road. The canal curves to the west, running parallel to the ring road, but

the trees in between muffle most of the noise of the traffic. You can follow the canal all the way to Yuyuantan Park, behind the Military Museum, via Yongdingmen Lu, You'anmen Lu, Guang'anmen Lu and Muxidi, however due to road construction at Yongdingmennei and one or two foot bridges that seem to have been designed expressly to thwart cyclists, a little bit of backtracking and occasionally switching sides is required. When you finally come to Muxidi, it's an easy ride back east along Fuxingmen/Chang'an Jie, or if you are really feeling adventurous, you could continue on past Yuyuantan and follow the canal to the Summer Palace.

A somewhat shorter ride, for those on the north-west side of town, is along the north-south section of the Yuan City Wall Relics Park (bikes are forbidden in the east-west section). This bit of park follows Xueyuan Lu, from Zhichun Lu to Xueyuan Nanlu, and also incorporates a canal, and a section of the remains of the Yuan Dynasty city wall.

Holidays is the Sun

By Ian Provan

As this prelude-to-summer special edition of *Beijing Today* makes abundantly clear, there is no shortage of things to do, see and eat in Beijing during the warmer months. But summer also brings, with any luck, summer holidays, and a chance to escape the city heat. So here are four suggestions for getting out of town for a week, or even just a weekend.

Down by the Seaside

Think summer – think beach, naturally! But instead of following the masses to Beidaihe or Qingdao this year, try somewhere a little off the beaten track. Changdao is an island beach resort in Shandong, off the northern coast of the Shandong Peninsula.

Changdao is actually a county, made up of 32 islands, the largest of which is also called Changdao. The main industry is fishing, and in 1994, it was named by the National Environmental Protection Agency as China's model for sustainable island development.

The main attractions are Pagoda Reef, Jiuzhangya Cliff, Crescent Moon Bay, Mount Feng and Mazu Temple, or just lazing around on the beach.

There are no five-star hotels as yet, but plenty of choices for budget accommodation, and it is a paradise for seafood lovers.

Getting there: Take the Beijing-Fuzhou Expressway (via the Beijing-Tianjin Expressway) to Jinan, capital of Shandong Province. Take the Jinan-Qingdao Expressway and turn off at Weifang for Yantai. Just before Laiyang, take the Bajiao exit, head west 20 kilometers to Penglai. From Penglai, there are hourly ferries to Changdao.

Crescent Moon Bay on North Changdao Island

Photo provided by Changdao Tourism Bureau



Climb Every Mountain

If your inclination is to escape the summer heat, rather than revel in it at the beach, a mountain retreat might sound more appealing. The various lists of "Five Famous Mountains" in China seem to cover at least 35 options that would all qualify for ideal summer get-aways. Again, we have gone for an off-the-beaten-track recommendation, and one very close to home.

Wuling Shan, just across the border of Beijing Municipality, in Hebei Province, is a two-and-a-half hour drive from downtown. The summit, frequently wreathed in clouds, is reached via a 40-minute ascent along a winding, but generously wide paved road; followed by an easy five-minute walk. Waitao peak, at 2118 metres, is the highest point of Hebei and Beijing's majestic Yan Shan (Swallow Mountains) range.

A popular destination for birdwatchers, the 180-square-kilometer reserve boasts over 1,800 plant species.

It is accessible from three directions – north, west, and south (the main entrance). Access via the South Gate is the most convenient, because it is here that you will find the well maintained paved road that connects the hotel and the summit.

To the south of Waitao Peak is the 48-meter God's Tower (Xianrenta), so called by the locals because it was assumed that no one but a god could ascend its sheer sides. The granite tower is a popular spot for climbers.

Getting There: Head north-east along the Beijing-Shunyi Road to Miyun. Shortly after Miyun take a right turn, signposted to Xinglong (兴隆). The road on the Beijing side is quite narrow in places, but improves after you cross the border into Hebei. At Xinglong, either continue to the mountain, or if you prefer drop the car at the park office (opposite the railway station at the far end of the town) and take the park bus.



God's Tower at Wuling Shan

Photo by Photocome



Grassland and "tourist yurts" near Xilinhot

Green Green Grass of Inner Mongolia

The grasslands are at their greenest in midsummer, and Inner Mongolia, while still hot, has a very pleasant summer climate. Xilinhot is about 700 kilometers due north of Beijing, as the crow flies. "Leagues" are the Mongolian equivalent of counties, and Xilinhot is the center of Xilingol League, which covers an area of approximately 200,000 square kilometers, bordering Mongolia to the north and Hebei Province to the south. Most of this is grassland, with a bit of desert and virgin birch forest for variety.

Xilinhot has been open to foreign tourists since the mid-'90s, although this still seems to be a well-kept secret. It is a small city, easily navigable, and there are several three and four star hotels right on the edge of town, offering splendid views of endless rolling green plains.

Although fewer and fewer Mongolians live in yurts these days, there are many to be seen around Xilinhot, most of which are there purely for the benefit of tourists. You can even stay in one for a night if you so desire.

South of Xilinhot, about 200 kilometers are the ruins of Yuanshangdu, or Xanadu, where did, as you know doubt are aware, did Kublai Khan a sacred pleasure dome decree, (Where Alph, the sacred river flows through caverns measureless to man, down to a sunless sea, according to Sam Coleridge).

Getting there: Take a train to Erlianhot (Chifeng), and then a bus to Xilinhot, or, much more straightforward, fly. CA 1109 departs Beijing every Sunday and Wednesday at 12:10 pm. The flight takes one hour and 40 minutes.



Putuo Zongcheng Temple, modeled on Lhasa's Potala Palace

Photo by Ian Provan

Take Me Back to ... Chengde

Well and truly on the beaten track, Chengde has been a summer get-away for Beijingers for several centuries. The Qing emperors with full retinue used to escape here when things got too hot in the capital, and made sure they would suffer no inconvenience in the change of location by having built a complex of palaces, temples and gardens that rivalled those in Beijing in the grandeur.

The main palace and garden, called Mountain Resort, covers an area of 564 square meters, almost half of Chengde's urban area, enclosed by a 10-kilometer wall. Construction began in 1703 during the rule of Emperor Kangxi and was completed in 1790, in time for Emperor Qianlong to enjoy it. There are more than 100 buildings within the resort, which is divided into the palace area and garden area.

On the hills that surround Chengde were 11 temples only seven of which remain intact. These include Puren (Universal Humanity) Temple, Sumeru (Happiness and Longevity) Temple and Puning (Universal Tranquility) Temple. Together they comprise the largest temple building complex existing in China.

The wooden engraved Buddha in Puning Temple, 22.28 meters tall, is the largest of its kind in the world. Its waist measures 15 meters and it has 42 arms. Some 120 cubic meters of wood, weighing 110 tons, were used in its construction.

Getting there: The Beijing-Chengde Expressway, as one might expect, goes straight to Chengde, it's about a four hour drive. Otherwise there are four trains daily from Beijing: No. 2251: departs 1:22 pm, arrives 6:26 pm; No. 7153: departs 4:28 pm, arrives 11:17; No. K711: departs 7:20 am, arrives 11:18 and No. 7155: departs 6:58 am, arrives 2:12 pm.

Top Sporting Events This Summer

By Tom Spearman

Summer is always a big season for sport and this year sees two of the biggest quadrennial events in the sporting calendar; the Olympic Games and the European Soccer Championships. Also vying for people's attention will be the French Open and, of course, the Tour de France, a race that promises to be especially memorable this year.

Great Expectations

Euro 2000 was hailed as the most exciting soccer tournament since the 1970 World Cup, with exciting, flowing football. Many people, including the England manager Sven-Goran Eriksson, believe the standard is actually far higher in the European Championship than in the World Cup. So the anticipation ahead of Portugal 2004 is intense.

France are the obvious favorites, but there are one or two question marks hanging over the side. France's victories in the 1998 World Cup and Euro 2000 were based on perhaps the finest defensive unit ever assembled, plus Zinedine Zidane. Zidane's still there, but the defense is aging. Still, midfield is the most important area of any team and France have the world's best defensive midfielder Patrick Viera (backed up by plenty of able deputies such as Claude Makelele) sitting behind the world's greatest attacking midfielder, Zidane. Add the quality of Robert Pires on the left and you have the world's best midfield. And up front there's Thierry Henry, widely considered the best striker in the world. Again, there's a question mark. Henry can be awesome, but has an unfortunate habit of going missing in the really big matches. He made little impact when his club side Arsenal tossed away their shot at the FA Cup and Champions League within the space of four days earlier this month. And in the final of Euro 2000, France were unable to find an equalizer against Italy until second string substitute Silvain Wiltord came on at the last minute.

France's first match is against England, who can field their strongest side since Euro '96. Trouble is, man for man it's still nowhere near as strong as France. For Zidane, read Paul Scholes (no competition); for Pires, read Stephen Gerrard (not a natural left footer); and for Viera, read Nicky Butt (you're having a laugh). Of course that leaves Beckham, probably England's best player and the man who can make a difference. England also have Michael Owen up front, a player who has consistently scored vital goals in the biggest games. Much will depend on his probable strike partner, teenage prodigy Wayne Rooney. This could yet be England's year.

Could Italy repeat their form of four years ago, when they were minutes from the trophy before the mighty Wiltord struck? They have the defense, as always, and they have superb attacking players in Christian Vieri, Francesco Totti and Alessandro Del Piero. But their midfield is made up of ordinary battlers like Gennaro Gattuso. Holland are the one team who have the attack to match France. Unfortunately they only have two decent defenders, Jaap Stam and Mario Melchiot. Frank de Boer's past it, Michael Reiziger has always been useless and the others are unproven. Germany? In a friendly against Romania this week they lost 5-1, their worst away defeat in 65 years. The German press responded by telling manager Rudi Voller that he might as well not bother going to Portugal.

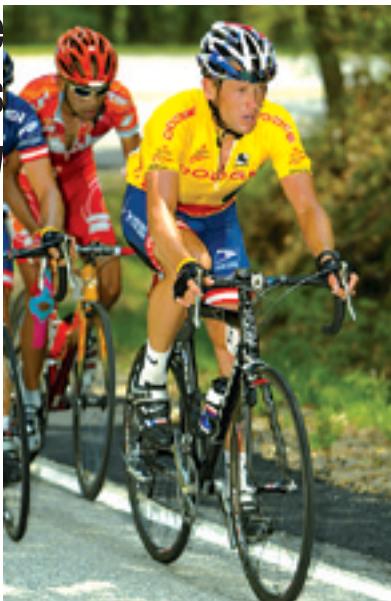
Could anyone else win it? Spain have lots of talented players, but they never produce the goods. So how about the hosts, Portugal? This is the lust hurrah for the "Golden Generation" of players including Luis Figo and Rui Costa. They have some promising youngsters coming through as well but there's a lot of pressure on their one and only reliable striker Pauleta.



Euro 2004 is the lust hurrah for the "Golden Generation" of players including Luis Figo (right).

Xinhua Photo

Three Weeks in July



Can Lance Armstrong take a sixth title this summer?

There are two principal questions in the run up to this year's Tour: does Lance Armstrong have enough gas left in the tanks to win a record sixth title? Or could his principal rival, German Jan Ullrich, step up and justify his huge talent with a second Tour win?

Right now it's looking good for Armstrong. Last year the mutterings began that maybe he was over the hill. In the previous four years he had destroyed his rivals and rendered the result a foregone conclusion well before the end of the race. But last year the dominance wasn't there and Ullrich was able to mount a surprisingly strong challenge before crashing in a rain soaked time trial on the penultimate stage of the race. However, Armstrong has just won the Tour de Georgia in America, displaying fine form. Whatever the doubts, he remains the strong favorite to step into history come July.

Can Ullrich still do the business? After the reign of five-time winner Miguel Indurain came to an end eight years ago, Ullrich seemed to all the world to be the natural successor. He won the tour in 1997 with such a margin over his rivals that cycling fans were concerned that a new era of drama-crushing dominance, shadowing even that of Indurain, was about to begin. Ullrich was young, savvy, enormously powerful and regarded as possibly the best prospect since Eddy Merckx. But a somewhat fragile temperament soon became apparent as the expectations mounted and in 1998, to general amazement, he lost the title to mountain specialist Marco Pantani. There was huge sadness over the death of the mercurial Pantani earlier this year, believed to be the result of a cocaine overdose, as he was a spectacular rider with the ability to win mountain stages in style but without the overall power to challenge the main contenders. While his victory in the Tour was greeted with delight as a glorious upset, it signaled a downward spiral for Ullrich, who didn't really look like a contender again until last year. Now, as seems to be the case every year, Ullrich's run up to the Tour de France has been blighted by reports that he's out of form and battling his weight.

There are one or two other contenders for top honors, such as Spain's Joseba Beloki, but unless Ullrich can regain top form in time, it will be more a case of Armstrong losing the title than anyone else winning it. The Texan, who overcame testicular cancer before the first of his tour wins, has never been accorded quite the same respect as other multiple winners of the event, but a sixth win would put even legends like Merckx and Anquetil in the shade.

French Frustration

May is here which means it's time for tennis to return to the red clay of Roland Garros, for the French Open. It's a unique event in the tennis calendar having spanned the ambitions of some of the greatest players in history. Sampras couldn't handle it, neither could McEnroe. And several of the current men's top ten are expected to huff, puff and bow out early, including the world No. 1 and No. 2 ranked players, Roger Federer and Andy Roddick.

The man in form at the moment is Argentine Guillermo Coria, having just won at Monte Carlo, also a clay court tournament. In fact Coria hasn't lost on clay in nearly a year. Last year, Spain's Juan Carlos Ferrero won in Monte Carlo before going on to claim the French Open title, and Brazil's Gustavo Kuerten doubled the two events before that.

It's less a case of "vive la difference" for the women. Last year's winner Justine Henin-Hardenne went on to triumph at the US Open and also won the Australian Open this year. She might not be able to defend her French title this year though. Like a number of top women players, including her Belgian compatriot and world No. 2 Kim Clijsters, Henin-Hardenne is battling injury and fatigue. The controversy over whether players are simply playing too much tennis has arisen again recently, with star names pulling out of events at the last minute due to injury. Even the mighty Williams sisters found their years of dominance interrupted by injury last year, although Serena still managed to claim the Wimbledon title.

Soccer presents China with one of its best chances of medal glory,

Less Talk, More Sport

The Olympics seem to be mired in all the wrong headlines right now. Do a search on the Internet and you're less likely to read about actual sport than about security fears, complaints about how far behind schedule the various construction projects are and high profile doping cases. Rumors are now swirling around American stars Marion Jones, who won five gold medals at the Sydney Olympics, and her boyfriend Tim Montgomery, the 100 meter world record holder.

But there's no evidence that anyone is planning a terrorist outrage in Athens and the signs now are that the Greek preparations will make it across the line in time for the starting gun. There is also plenty of mouthwatering action to look forward to, in particular a swimming showdown between Australia and the US. Australia's "Torpedo" Ian Thorpe was probably the story of the last Olympics, powering his way to three gold medals. Last month he nearly blew his chances of qualifying for his strongest event, the 400 meters freestyle, by slipping off the blocks and into the pool before the qualifying race. He was thus disqualified from the event, but as Australia howled with protest a teammate stepped aside to let Thorpe take his place.

The good news for sports fans is that Thorpe has some serious competition this year for the aquatic limelight. The American press has been raving about 18-year-old Michael Phelps and how he could become the first man to match, possibly even beat the record haul of 7 gold medals by Mark Spitz at the 1972 Olympic Games. Phelps already holds five world records and has a shot at eight gold medals at the Olympics.

America is strongly represented throughout the games, but ironically won't be present for the much derided baseball event. Having won gold in Sydney, the US team was embarrassingly knocked out of the qualifying tournament for Athens by unfancied Mexico. It's led to growing rumors that baseball will be soon pitched out of the Olympics. Other notable absentees from Athens include former Olympic soccer champions Nigeria who failed to qualify.

Soccer presents China with one of its best chances of medal glory, the women's team having won the qualifying tournament this week by beating Japan in Hiroshima. The two teams are set to renew their rivalry in Athens, Japan's women having also qualified by beating South Korea. However, the track and field events might not prove so exhilarating for Chinese sports fans. Feng Shuyong, head coach of the Chinese athletics team, cautioned against too much optimism last week. "We will try our best to win gold, but it's very difficult," he told Xinhua. "No Chinese athlete has a winning advantage in any events." Never mind, there's always ping pong.



Chinese players celebrate their ticket to Athens after beating Japan 1-0 in the AFC women's Olympic Football Qualifying Tournament in Hiroshima on April 26.

Photos by Photocome

Selected Holiday Sports

By Zhang Bo

With the May 1st Holiday coming up, *Beijing Today* has selected some sports that readers may like to try as the weather gets warmer.

Golf

Huatang International Golf Club

With a total area of 100 hectares, the club is only 30 minutes by taxi from Tian'anmen Square. The club offers an international standard 18-hole championship golf course, golf school, and accommodation.

Where: Yanjiao Economic Development Zone, Sanhe, Hebei Province **Open:** 8:00 am – 5:00 pm **Caddie Fee:** 120 yuan **Green Fee:** 780 yuan **Tel:** 6159 8888

Beijing International Golf Club

Built in 1986, this was Beijing's first golf course. It covers an area of 100 hectares and is next to the Ming Tombs Reservoir.

Where: west of the Ming Tombs Reservoir, Changping District **Open:** 8:00 am – 5:00 pm **Caddie Fee:** 120 yuan **Green Fee:** 1,100 yuan **Tel:** 6076 2288

Beijing Golf Club

Covering an area of 200 hectares, this course was built in 1987. It was selected for the golf tournament for the Beijing Asian Games in 1990.

Where: east bank of Chaobai River, Shunyi District **Open:** 7:30 am – 5:00 pm **Caddie Fee:** 120 yuan **Green Fee:** 700 yuan **Tel:** 8947 0005

Horse Riding

Xiangshan Riding Club

Where: entrance of Xiangshan Mountain Park **Open:** 8:00 am – 5:00 pm **Riding charges:** 150 yuan per hour, per person **Tel:** 6259 0713

Kangxi Grassland Riding Club

Where: Kangzhuang, Yanqing County **Open:** 24 hours **Admission fee:** 30 yuan **Riding charges:** 100 – 120 yuan per hour, per person **Tel:** 6913 1640

Oriental Rider's Amusement Park

Where: Huangcun, Daxing County **Open:** 24 hours **Riding charges:** 80 – 280 yuan per hour, per person **Tel:** 6927 5019, 6927 5588

Tennis

SciTech Club

Where: No.22, Jianguomenwai Dajie, Chaoyang District **Open:** 9:00 am – 12:00 pm **Charges:** 60 yuan per hour during the daytime; 80 yuan per hour in the evening **Tel:** 6512 2288

Beijing International Tennis Center

Where: No.50, Tiantan Donglu, Xuanxian District **Open:** 8:00 am – 10:00 pm **Charges:** 300 yuan per hour **Tel:** 6714 2374

Shangri-la Tennis Center

Where: No.29, Zizhu Lu, West Third Ring Road, Haidian District **Open:** 9:00 am – 11:00 pm **Charges:** 180 yuan per hour **Tel:** 6841 2211-2881

Swimming

Beijing New Otani Hotel

Where: No.26, Jianguomenwai Dajie, Chaoyang District **Open:** 7:00 am–11:00 pm **Charges:** 120 yuan per person **Kunlun Hotel**

Where: No.2, Xinyuan Nanlu, Chaoyang District **Open:** 6:30 am – 11:00 pm **Charges:** 150 yuan per person **Gloria Plaza Hotel**

Where: No.1, Jianguomenwai Dajie, Chaoyang District **Open:** 12:00 am – 4:00 pm **Charges:** 80 yuan per person

Soothing Internal Fires

It may seem outlandish, but eating the right foods can help cool heat within the body and thereby make outside temperatures more bearable, according to traditional Chinese medicine. Some foods with such quenching qualities are a bit unusual, but most are simple to prepare, meaning edible treatments for overheating and other warm weather ailments are good for any summer meal.

Yin-Yang Eating

By James Liu

According to traditional Chinese medicine, summer brings a host of possible health problems, many revolving around the changing balance of hot and cool elements within the body. Fortunately, careful eating can be enough to keep those opposing internal forces in harmony.

To explain the basic concepts of healthy warm weather dining, *Beijing Today* talked to Hu Ke, visiting professor at the Ear, Nose and Throat Department of the China-Japan Friendship Hospital.

"In the view of traditional Chinese medicine, or TCM, human beings, plants, animals, everything in the universe, has two sides: the *yin*, or negative, and *yang*, or positive. These two forces interact, and if a human body's *yin* and *yang* are in an imbalanced state, that person will definitely get sick," said Hu in fluent English.

The high temperatures of summer naturally cause yang levels in the body to increase, according to the experienced doctor. "So people can purposely eat foods which have much more *yin*, such as green bean soup (*ludou tang*), chrysanthemum tea, honeysuckle tea, rose tea and agar jellies," Hu recommended.

Many vegetables and fruits, such as cucumbers, tomatoes, celery, lily, cabbage and watermelon, are also natural body coolants and therefore are prime for summer dining.

At the same time, there is still risk of excessive exposure to cold during summer as people gravitate towards air conditioning and enjoy cold showers after playing on hot days. "In cases of too much cold, boiled ginger and brown sugar water are the best therapies," Hu told *Beijing Today*. "People should be aware that not everyone needs to take *yin* foods to balance their internal *yang*. Different people have different health conditions."

According to Hu, there are two easy ways to assess one's own level of *yin-yang* balance.

One is to check the color of the hairs on the tongue. Thick and yellow hair indicates the body has more *yang* than *yin*, while a near absence of fuzz is a sign that more *yin* is needed.

Facial skin color is another good indicator. A yellowish, weary-looking face is a sign that there is too much *yin*, too little *yang*, and a reddish complexion is a symptom of the exact opposite condition.

After graduating from Beijing Medical University (now Peking University Health Science Center) in 1966, Hu worked at Beijing's Academy of Traditional Chinese Medicine for 15 years. In 1980, he transferred to Concorde (Xiehe) Hospital and stayed there a decade before heading to Canada and studying at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver. He retired in 2000, but still works at the China-Japan Friendship Hospital every Friday as visiting professor of the ENT Department. He can be reached by email at huke37@hotmail.com



Photo by Long



Taiji jiaxiangji
(Sauteed chicken, 28 yuan)



Taiji shuangrong
(sweet yam and red bean paste, 18 yuan)

Photos by Lou Ge



Taiji yuanyanggeng
(chicken porridge, 18 yuan)

Foods For Keeping Cool

By Zhao Hongyi



Chrysanthemum (*juhua*)

Traditional Chinese medical theories hold that chrysanthemums are cooling agents helpful in releasing inner heat, or *huo*. For that reason, the flowers can prevent such health problems as fevers, colds and high blood pressure while also promoting weight loss.

Chinese use fresh chrysanthemum to make wine, porridge, dishes, cakes, soups and desserts or simply as attractive garnishes. In the spring, flowers are dunked in *baijiu*, white spirits, to add flavor, while in the summer, dried chrysanthemums are brewed in hot water to make light tea equally delicious hot or cold. Dried flowers are even packed into pillows to provide comforting, sleep-promoting fragrance.



Photo by Sarah Bai

at fighting living inflammation. The little vegetables are also sometimes sliced and made into porridge, or processed into a crispy pudding served with morning tea in southern China.

Because they are literally raised in muck, water chestnuts need to be thoroughly washed and peeled before they are eaten. That can be a time-consuming process, but do not go for speed and opt for the canned variety, the taste and texture of which is completely inferior to the fresh originals.



Photo by Sarah Bai

Bitter melon (*kugua*)

Also known as balsam pear, bitter melon is a vegetable that divides diners into clear groups: haters and addicts. Its sharp, bitter flavor is certainly an acquired taste, but according to traditional Chinese medicine one definitely worth acquiring, as bitter melon is the king of cooling vegetables. Not only can it quell internal fires, it acts as a detoxifier, boosts immunity, helps balance blood pressure and can even prevent and treat diabetes and its complications.

Chinese cooks prepare bitter melon in many ways, some as simple as slicing it paper thin, soaking it a bit and then salting it lightly for a crisp cold dish, others more elaborate and calling for the melons to be sliced into rounds and then stuffed

with meat or other fillings. The most common and arguably most delicious way to prepare it is a simple stir-fry with garlic to make *qingchao kugua*.

Recipe:
Stir-fried bitter melon
2 ripe (bright green, no spots) bitter melons
3 cloves garlic, sliced thin
1 tbsp Thai fish sauce (*yulu*)
1 tbsp cooking oil

Cut bitter melons lengthwise and scoop out seeds and soft surrounding membranes with a spoon. Slice melons into thin half-circles. Put melon slices into a bowl, cover with water, add a pinch of salt and stir. Soak bitter melon for 10 minutes, which will brighten its green color and remove some of its bitter edge.

Put oil in a sauté pan or wok and heat. Toss in garlic and cook, stirring frequently, one minute until fragrant and starting to brown. Add bitter melon and stir-fry over high heat for one minute. Add fish sauce and cook one to two minutes more, then serve.



Water caltrop (*lingjiao*)

Chinese kids like to chow on these bizarre bat-like fruits of an aquatic plant when fresh for their sweet juices. In times long past, people boiled water caltrop to eat during severe grain shortages. Today, the freaky fruits are still sometimes used for braising with meat, as they can cut down on greasiness and add flavor.

Just in time for summer's excesses, water caltrop not only is

a good coolant, it can help people recover from overdrinking. After a night of boozing, juice made from fresh caltrop meat and hulls can make the morning after much easier.

These starchy fruits are even useful in preventing cancer, as soup made from them is potent in warding off and combating cervical and gastric cancer.



Lotus Root (*ou*)

The large, sausage-shaped rhizome of an aquatic plant commonly known as the water lily, lotus root is pierced with 10 air tunnels so that when cut crosswise, the white slices look something like large snowflakes.

Uncooked lotus root juice can reduce internal heat and

stop internal bleeding, while the cooked root is good for the blood and boosts energy.

The starchy yet crisp flesh is slightly sweet, and may be sliced or grated for use in salads, stir-fries or soups and stews. It needs to be peeled before cooking, but watch for discoloration, as the creamy meat will change color quickly when exposed to air.

Recipe: Lotus root and pork knuckle soup
350 g fresh lotus root, peeled and cut into chunks
1 small pork knuckle, around 675 g
1 knob ginger, peeled and bruised
1 tsp salt

Pour nine cups of water into a soup pot, then add lotus root, pork knuckle and ginger. Bring to a rolling boil and skim off scum from surface until liquid is relatively clear.

Reduce heat and simmer for three hours or so until the soup has reduced to around six cups. Remove the pork and ginger.

Spoon the fat off the surface of the soup to degrease. To serve, ladle the soup into individual bowls, optionally adding slices of the pork or serving the meat on the side for dipping into light soy sauce. Makes four to six servings.

Lotus Leaf Porridge

By James Liu

Over many centuries, Beijingers have come up with lots of foods to help ease the effects of the city's hot, arid summer air. One fragrant favorite is lotus leaf porridge, which is cooling, delicious and easy to make.

Strict tradition in cooking this dish calls for use of only *jingmi*, a kind of japonica rice that is sticky but does not lose shape after cooking, and fully-grown lotus leaves, which are fragrant yet not bitter as leaves past their prime can be.

For a sweeter stew, add a bit of sugar just before putting the leaf in place. That is the best way to ensure the sweetness and flavors and fragrances of the rice and lotus will meld.

Ice, Ice Baby

Nothing staves off summer heat like a good frozen treat. Ready-made options come in an amazing range of forms, from basic popsicles to the more bizarre bars reviewed below. Other kinds of ice-based desserts, such as granitas and shaved ice, are easy and fun to make at home and promise soothing, cooling refreshment.

By Joel Kirkhart

During Beijing's sweltering summer, ice cream and other frozen treats are less luxuries than they are necessities. And if necessity is the mother of invention, it should come as no surprise that many of the ice cream options on the local market are, well, inventive.

Yet it still is difficult to rationalize the existence of hamburger ice cream and orange and cheese flavored popsicles, just two of the many bizarre frozen freaks that populate local freezers.

Predictably, a lot of these inventive items are not good – in fact, they stink. But a few defy their unconventional ideas, spastic packaging and their bizarre looks to actually make it as yummy treats. Finding the good ones requires plenty of fun, sometimes punishing, experimentation.

Corn. Corn is sweet. Therefore, it could be good in ice cream, right? Well, at least two manufacturers have decided to give the concept a shot, with mixed results.

The Yumi Xiang is a cone of vanilla icing covered by a Captain Crunch condom, a thin, wafery thing pressed to look like it has kernels with a corn flavor. The ice cream core is creamy and satisfying, raising this product from novelty to actual viable dessert status.

Harder to stomach is the **Yumi Songren** bar, which takes the popular restaurant dish of corn with pine nuts and presents it in frozen form. The results are somehow worse than they sound, as the pine nuts are soft and bitter and the ice cream itself has a disquieting, urine-like flavor.

Then there's "rice cream" like the Putao Xueci, or raisin rice ice, bar, a rod of frozen sugar water studded with cooked rice grains and raisins. It looks awful and has little flavor beyond being painfully sweet.

Beans served cold are nothing new in China, as nearly frozen bean treats go back hundreds of years (see story on page 3). A few more recent items try to combine them with nuts.

The Banli Hongdou chestnut and red bean bar comes in impressive packaging, covered with pictures of roasted chestnuts and bearing the bold phrase: "Produced meticulously." The meek bar inside fails to live up – nor does it offend with its weak flavor and nary a hint of chestnut.

Certainly nuttier is the walnut-themed **Hupo Taoren** bar. The outer coating is little more than sugared ice, but the darker inside layer has the sweet fruitiness of red beans laced with a distinct walnut flavor. There's no way this is everyone's cup of tea, but there are worse products out there.

"Who Stole My Cheese?" proclaims the box of Mengniu's Cheesy (Nailao) ice cream bar (when will that phrase ever go away?). Theft is not something to be too worried about with this half-baked product, a boring, triangular slab of off-tasting frozen cream in a box flimsily closed with scotch tape.

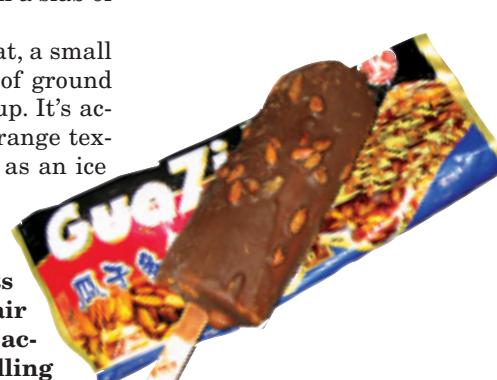
Cantaloupe ice cream is not too fruity of an idea, but no hoh-hum strawberry either. The **Ding Gua Gua** bar is an unimpressive-looking slab of day-glo green ice cream on a stick, but it does the business, genuinely tasting of cantaloupe with a pleasant, understated creaminess. This is a popsicle to turn to on days when the heat is cooking your melon.

The packaging of the **Sesame Street** bar says it is "nutritional cereal flavor" – fortunately, that turns out better than it sounds. It is middle-of-the-road, not really bad, with tangibly sesame-flavored ice cream, a few beans and a thin chocolate coating.

Brother bars **White & Crackling** and **Black & Crackling** could hardly be more different. The first is a decent, rich stick of ice cream laced with crisp chocolate entrails and coated in a kind of crispy translucent coating. Black & Crackling starts out benign but then comes on with an overpowering sesame flavor. With its nasty coating and two-layered cement grey insides, eating this triangular bar is like munching on a slab of soft semi-frozen asphalt.

The **Xiao Wanzi**, or "little ball," is just that, a small sphere of ice cream enclosed in a wrapper of ground glutinous rice and presented its own little cup. It's actually pretty good, but the wrapper has a strange texture that takes getting used to – think of it as an ice cream *jiaozi*.

Last and probably least, the **Guazi Duoduo** bar is the winner in the misleading wrapper category. The package depicts a marbleized chocolate and vanilla affair chock full of sunflower seeds, while the actual item is an uninspired mix of icy filling tasting of bad cream, filmy chocolate and a few sunflower seeds, for an overall effect of eating some kind of frozen camping ration.



Photos by Joel Kirkhart



Watermelon granita

Granita Bonanza

By Sarah Bai

There are summer days when ice cream just does not do the trick in providing refreshment. It's the cream – it can simply be too rich when all the body wants is something cool, refreshing and a little sweet.

Those are times to go for granita. Somewhere between a fruit drink and a popsicle, this classic Italian icy treat has a grainy, slushy texture and intense flavoring that can really hit the spot on a hot day. Plus, they have nearly no fat, less calories than most ice cream and are so easy to make that it can be done at home without any fancy equipment.

The secret to granita's hallmark texture is how it is frozen. Instead of being churned or frozen solid, it requires being stirred or scraped to form lots of little, cooling, flavorful flakes and grains.

Making granita is fun and easy, requiring no more than a metal pan or bowl, a fork or spoon, a freezer and sometimes a food processor. And they can be made with all kinds of ingredients, such as citrus and sweeter fruit, coffee and tea, spirits for a heady kick, and even vegetables to make savory treats perfect as palate cleaners.

Below are some simple recipes for granitas, but they should only be guides. Once the freezing process is mastered, cooks should let their imaginations go wild and create granitas all their own.

Recipe: Watermelon granita bowls

7 cups watermelon, seeded and cut into 1-cm cubes (from about 2 kg of melon)
1/2 cup sugar
2 tablespoons fresh lemon or lime juice
1 large ripe strawberry, hulled
Pinch of salt
Dozen limes

Puree watermelon in blender or food processor in batches until smooth. Return four cup of puree to processor and add other ingredients. Blend again until smooth.

Follow the same instructions from recipe above for freezing granita.

During freezing, cut limes in half lengthwise. Cut carefully around the edges of the flesh, leaving the white pith and green skin intact, and then carefully spoon out the flesh to create small bowls. Shave a thin piece off the bottom of each bowl to provide a stable base if necessary, but do not cut through.

To serve, spoon the granita into the bowls, creating mini watermelons. To heighten the effect, top with a few raisins to look like seeds. Now that's cool...

Recipe: Lemon granita

This authentic Sicilian granita is very tart, perhaps too much so for some people, so feel free to increase the sugar to 1/2 cup.

3 large lemons
1 cup spring water
1/3 cup granulated sugar
Remove the zest, or yellow outer skin, from two lemons using a vegetable peeler. Squeeze lemons to yield 1/2 cup juice.

Put water and sugar in a small saucepan and heat, stirring repeatedly, until sugar is completely dissolved. Add the zest, then remove from heat and pour into a bowl. Cover bowl and chill syrup in refrigerator until cold. Remove zest and stir in the lemon juice.

Freezing: Pour the mixture into a metal, preferably wide, bowl and put into the freezer. Take out every 30 minutes and stir until the liquid is granular and slushy, not frozen solid – normally around three hours. Serve immediately.



Lemon granita

Cross-Straits Coolers

By James Liu

Shaved ice, a popular summer treat in Taiwan, has spread all over East Asia and gained a serious foothold in Beijing as well. Typically, these semi-frozen concoctions are made by covering a pile of small ice chunks with sweet red beans in sauce and some evaporated milk, known around town as *bingdousha*.

The spread of food processors and blenders into common kitchens, however, has opened new possibilities for making this Taiwanese sweet at home. With a strong food processor or blender, it is easy to grind ice to make the standard *bingdousha*, or follow the recipes below to make alternative shaved ices closer to drinkable smoothies in texture.

Strawberry Shaved Ice

Ingredients: 7 strawberries, 3 tbsp sugar, 1 tbsp soda water, 1/2 cup shaved ice

Dice the strawberries, then put them and the other ingredients into a glass. Mix together for two minutes and serve. This drink is believed to be helpful in curbing high blood pressure and preventing heart disease.

Taro Shaved Ice

Ingredients: 100 grams taro, 1 cup fresh milk, 2 tbsp honey, 2 cups shaved ice

Skin the taro and dice. Boil the diced taro for 20 minutes, then remove from pot and air dry. Put milk and shaved ice into blender and mix for two minutes. Add taro and honey and stir. Makes two servings.

Where to go for shaved ice and related cold treats:

Bellagio – all shaved ices priced at 22 yuan

Where: 25 Xiaoyun Lu, Chaoyang

Open: 11 am - 4 am

Tel: 8451 9988

Banmuyuan – Mango (15 yuan) and taro (12 yuan) shaved ices at nice prices

Where: Second floor, Jinghui Building, 118B Jianguo Lu, Chaoyang

Open: 7 am - 10 pm

Tel: 6567 5672

Blue and White – Fast-food style *bingdousha* in several forms, all for 6 yuan

Add: 69 Dongdanbei Dajie, Dongcheng

Open: 24 hours

Tel: 6527 8964